Declassified and Approved For Release 2012/11/08 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000302050009-6

CIA PAGE 1-A

WASHINGTON TIMES
26 November 1986

NSC in rough seas over charges funds slotted for Contras

By Roger Fontaine
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

NEWS ANALYSIS

President Reagan's National Security Council, battered by the resignations of four NSC advisers in six years, faces its toughest challenge in the wake of revelations that its staff was involved in diverting funds to secret bank accounts belonging to the Nicaraguan resistance.

That disclosure by Attorney General Edwin Meese III yesterday has already caused Mr. Reagan to say it "raises serious questions of propriety," and that the Justice Department investigation will continue.

The president also made the extraordinary decision to appoint a special review board "to conduct a comprehensive review of the role and procedures of the National Security Council staff in the conduct of foreign and national security policy."

The review is unprecedented in the 40-year history of the NSC staff, first formed under President Harry Truman.

The Truman NSC staff was small and carried out a "careful, methodical coordinating process to make sure everyone was dealt into the decision-making process," according to Ray Cline, a 30-year veteran of the CIA.

That process was supposed to replace the ad hoc and personal foreign policy-making characteristic of earlier presidencies, which often left other agencies — the Department of State in particular — in the dark.

In contrast with Mr. Truman's NSC, the functions of the Reagan NSC were never clearly laid out in the beginning. Under the Cabinet government system that Mr. Reagan had strongly endorsed as a presidential candidate, the chief responsibility for making foreign policy was given to the State Department. The broader concerns of national security would be divided among the State and Defense departments and the CIA.

Without a strong NSC staff, however, it was often an embarrassingly public free-for-all, especially in the early years of Mr. Reagan's first term.

As NSC advisers came and went, the basic mission of the staff began to resemble John F. Kennedy's NSC, in which a small body of experts drawn from other agencies and the academic world informed the president what the bureaucracy was saying and doing on national security policy and what their own advice was.

Recently, after being repeatedly frustrated by leaks to the press, some NSC staff members apparently were put in charge of secret and high-risk operations which have since come partly to light.

Other governmental bodies were cut out of the process. NSC operations began to resemble some of the projects carried out by Richard Nixon's NSC in the last three years of that president's administration.

"NSC staff has never been equipped to do operations. It should cease," said one one former high-ranking NSC official. The staff now faces probes by the Justice Department, the special review board and several congressional investigations that again raise touchy questions of executive privilege.

"It is an institutional tragedy," said the same ex-official. "It would be a terrible thing for the Congress to get into how the NSC is organized. In good times and bad, it has been a source of power and strength. The mystique of the NSC is an essential part of the deterrence of the United States.

"Every [NSC staff] memo will be written for how they look in history," he added. "If you threaten the NSC, it will weaken and vitiate the advice The Reagan NSC staff will undergo one more buffeting as the guessing game begins as to who will be the president's fifth NSC adviser. The turnover of national security advisers, many believe, not only has destroyed continuity at the NSC, but severely undercut the president's ability to put his policies in place.

So far as morale is concerned, one veteran NSC staffer said yesterday: "People are doing their job and not reflecting on what's next. We've been through crises before. This is not a bunch of people jumping out of windows."

Names that have already surfaced as possible successors to John Poindexter are Jeane Kirkpatrick, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations; Richard Perle, assistant secretary of defense; John Lehman, secretary of the Navy; Brent Scowcroft, NSC adviser under Gerald Ford; former Texas Republican Sen. John Tower; and Lawrence Eagleburger, former undersecretary of state in the Reagan administration.

That no one has yet been announced as a replacement indicates the haste in which the Poindexter resignation was offered and accepted.

Declassified and Approved For Release 2012/11/08 : CIA-RDP90-00965R000302050009-6